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Negative spaces

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Negative spaces

by

Anne Elizabeth Pepper

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
MASTER OF ARTS

Major: English (Creative Writing)

Major Professor: Neal Bowers

Iowa State University

Ames, IA

2000

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Graduate College
Iowa State University

This is to certify that the Master's thesis of

Anne Elizabeth Pepper

has met the thesis requirements of Iowa State University

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INTERSTICE

Negative space

As there is no name
for things that go bump
spaces that fill in the unoccupied
line, one must construct words from
formless air, superlineate, cross all t's, dot
the eyes

draw an ocular frame in which to
fit a meaning that submits itself only to the creator,
leaves listeners to decipher their own codes, modulates
within each set of vocal chords, becomes memorable only in
relation to the thing being compared to, not against.

Exampol - fenetiks wud allowe won too reinvent meening
without the care of cross-intellechewallism, all this becomes is

blah blah blah blah blah ... nosensense non syne.
Within the system of 0 and 1, everything becomes
pixels that need defrazzlement, can be zippered up or down
into contrivance, contraband of the frantic engineer mind, inmate
of a self-made prison, our relation to the word itself cannot be found.

Yodeling in Latin is more beneficial than a series of
majestic loops and stylistic gashes in the page.

Scalpted

I grapple it lately
 unfortunate absence of centre
 pliable skein of grey matter winds
 through my head like bared wind

an extra thread of hair entangled
 in rubber band, wound and wound
 around it to merge into another, defines
 its features by semierotic chaos.

My hands rake a presence in clay, bland
 prominences rise and fall with foggy breath,
 the drop-cloth becomes white lace lingerie,
 fingers smooth ripples into mounds.

I feed it mirth and banter, embody it by
 moisturizing, reconditioning, smoothing,
 polish, wax, or exfoliation. The it still
 remains featureless, a blighted phantasm

on the chilled tip of mirrored tongue, should
 be lashed to stillness, but instead swarms
 vague and full of meaning, its mannequin model sister
 lies prone in dusty corner, eating air and flaunting
 a chipped paint smile to glean worshippers,

inhales radio beauty commercials like laxatives. A pill
 can cure everything from migrant eyes to lapidary
 intentions, crazed writings in stone, chiseled with fine
 bone tools draped in tresses bent from fair heads.

Patchwork

I am pieces, torn. Crazy-
quilt put together with
glue, zigzags connecting
naugohyde, brastraps,
bits of bone, ivory chalk,
wax paper.

I am overstuffed, mad
with manuscripts, expired
marriage licenses, bloody
cotton, cinnamon sticks,
calamine lotion, dead flies,
cardboard boxes.

I cover odors that need
hidden, skin that seeps
powder, lotion, smoke,
grease, rubber. Steal
these for my own, ignite
fires for whitecold toes,

give refuge from refuse.

Small presence

Small presence, that is
for me, mine, intact.
has not always been
around to smile, grope,

please me. If you want
to stay, sit, be admired,
converse, listen to me
play some Chopin, or

Liszt. I've even been
working on Rachmaninoff,
dead man with a stretch that
mimics playdough. I

cannot quite reach you,
you thing quite inside,
surfacing, you do,
yes you do, if you would

let yourself be. You are
and you are again. Can
malingering, fly, plague,
castigate. Master this

immense life. You can
witness a being, your
own strength, coming
into focus, flush and furious.

Breathing Things

She inhabits closets,
becomes intimate with
blue velvet, tulle, musty
spider drawings.

One small dim light
illuminates its still
calm, a sighing breath
her house exhales in

time with her own. No
mirror cracks here, brown
shoes calm, white drowsing.
Plastic wrap enshrines a

gaping o-hole, shoesize,
madmark of past worshiper.
It siphons raspy air, house
lung, gum wrapper crackle.

Inside closet door, a shrine to
loneliness. Kindness steps
outside to let her occupy -
small company. Sienna light

somersaults out as well,
licks her toe as batteries tick
out. She remains, sits in its
pit, feeling included.

Schizophrenic shed

She huddles in the streak
of sunlight that pierces her
blue eyes, hands of vices, a barbie
head, hair knotted in dirt.

Its body is outside the tin doors, a
decapitated reminder of the voices
that speak a forgotten language, change her tones,
we climb inside to the orange shag remnant.

Peeking out, a bandaid heals the headless nub, I
follow the S curve of her lynching string
looped over an eternal highheeled foot, half-
buried in dirt and chewed to the heel.

We grasp each other's hair and braid the
silky strands together, wiggle sandy toes until
they pop, white plastic record player skips
old mcdonald old mcdonald, had a had a --

she blooms into teeth and her inner weather
beats her fists to her porcelain head, she is
shattering back and forth, but with EIEIO, EIEIO, it's over --
except for new childbass voice that sneers,
shit, I eat you up honey.

I lick my teeth and scoot back to a corner, an ache
fractures where our siamese twinning ended,
in the headsnarl there is warmth and a buzzing that
she bends closer to hear.

Hanging Holly Hobbie

I own my own
sleeping head, invent
a rocking bed to shut
lidless eyes in.

It doesn't fit, this
stupid calico, its straps
wind like bad wind.
I do not dress myself.

You cannot blame
a dolly for her state-
ments, state of mind.
I would choose another

name, Holly never became
rare, or wanted. Maybe
Juniper, Pearl, or Trina
Best of all pinata, for it fits tightly.

I am strung, neckwise, completely
airborne, on a steeple-spire,
child's bedpost, hung
limply after she throws

me to red shag, interminably
amused by my trampolining
hair, yellow flag, banana
peel, paper streamer.

I want my bed to sleep
in, soft satin pillow, not this
high rise plunging, deep
death of elevation.

premedicated

i take one and one half per day little blue
pills –depression- break them in half
with angular eye –teeth to
expose chalky white insides, just
temporary ingested sanity

trace esophagus, downwaydown, comfort the
muted bruise under my left hand nextto
pinky finger -- shiny
paled skin, -invisible - tracings of eager
separation rise
blotchymarred to the skintips, felt

divorce of mother from father --
a golden haloed ring of dis-ease,
april 6 1999 in court then
a wish and 27 candles. birthday equals divorce.

i throw rice, rose petals versus fits and
suck small pills au jour -- my
veil for adjudication, the judge's
flat atonation. subtraction of i do. candles
are blown out.

there's a hearing, a saying, a memory
in the near that slips sideways
on my marriage sheets, hurtles toward
hardfloor headfirst, quite engaging:

something old
something new ... my
borrowed, swallowed,
something blue.

STRICTURE

Changeling

Mother wears a fitted girdle
waxes her legs supple as deer skin
parades violently through
silicone valleys in the near-dark.

Laughs at city boys who fear gray mice
as she scrambles for breath, reaches
stealthily for her pitchfork, spikes the
small meat to the barn wall, yodels Bach.

Topples precariously in needle-heels
died a deep crimson – cooks over cake,
poodle-skirt frosting. Licks a slender
manicured finger, pokes its marbled
surface and a belly button is realized.

Transformed, she becomes 40 years
conservative, plain-clothed, muddy
and freckled, wears overalls stitched
handmade, did the buttonholes herself
goes barefoot over rock salt, feels saved.

Cannot remember who killed j.r. doesn't
care, watches reruns of "I Love Lucy"
in black and white, munches popcorn
under the severe scrutiny of schnauzer's
yellow-brown eyes.

She sucks in two children's worth of stomach, distends and
goes portly, suddenly feels
the divorce fit her like a corset.

scarification

she collided with
linoleum, slid up the
stairs with a grind,
then sunk down to writhe.

no marking, but blood
punching to get out, an
isolated pointillism, she
beat time like a pendulum.

bruises remain on holiday,
later the pain man forgets
to visit as well, then a
pucker stays on, a rounded

bowl under the skin
more sanitary, doesn't stain
the stairwell. Her friends
finger the shin depression,

eyebrows shocked, shank
locked to her body, she tells
stories of bone chips, dried
blood, and gristle.

misogamy

Mother cans tomatoes,
shredding fibers with
quick flicks into stone-
ware bowls, fills

Kerr jars brimful. Water
boils for sealing juice
in, preservative, seed.
I stack downstairs,

harbinger of patient
pickling, that ticks in
stacks under carpeted
stairs for years.

She is upstairs, singing
full loud, Handel's Messiah,
in Alleluia chorus, her deity
is reborn in song, while

daily expiration sighs
in her basement. We
sit, wait for a boil, slow
baptism. Mother,

sweating basil, blows
torrid tea swells, adds
honey. Remembers
last can she opened

with her muscled
fingers, tough wrist,
how it burned nostrils
cracked on its roost.

Dainty sulphur (Nathalis iole)

You pick the paper
up, the fragile wings,
a yellow powder butterfly
held at an unnatural angle

the parchment assesses
value, pins a diamond
like a thorax to its carat weight,

clarity, color. A trace of jaundice
on a gem reduces its worth, and
without scaled pigment an insect
will slowly die. Open the jingling door,

feel your limbs assessed
by vision, a grinding machine will halt its
metallic whirl - see a man in flying lapels
swish-swish towards you with a corduroy smile

he will say nothing but
stop abruptly at stainless steel sink - watch -
diamond powder comes off the jeweler's finger-
tips as he washes dust under
water, dries hands, asks with his eyes.

hold the wingtips of the paper toward
him, then the weight of its body, a gem. Say, "it
is special, a memento. I want it reset."

hand it to him. his pupils will remain fixed
on the neat folding of your hands, avoiding
the utterance. he will don an eyepiece. study. "an H color jewel is not

worth resetting," he will murmur, "particularly a small marquis,
such a difficult stone to manipulate." his creased finger will point. "see that
small flaw, minute tint -- like a dainty sulphur?"
a small cough during the words-. he'll
drop it in your open palm - small flutter.

His lapels are silent; embarrassed.
"I'm afraid I can't help you" -- he'll pass you the limp
paper, leave scaleless marks
where fingerprints rubbed ink, and the diamond
will struggle in your pocket.

lock up

my mother
ankle-chained herself
to her Singer, wound
its bobbin round her
tapered index finger

watched, waited - planned
its purplish tip welt. I
hear from our neighbors,
who watch binoculars,
from darkened windows

deep-blue in night. She
darns the same gold
toed sock, rips stitches out,
starts over again. Repeats
four times, stops -

smiles warily. Daddy's
still a gold toe man, now
he buys new when pink
nail shines through. Does
not accept change,

writes monthly checks
for mother's shirt-pattern
squares, handkerchief
drapes, calfskin napkins,
ignores a clanking chain.

iron pyrite

Daddy, eyes
deceive little, a
tongue trickier when
licking false words.

Fall like plaster off
roof of your mouth,
dry the air to sand -
we are desert.

That gold is real, enlacing
your neck, your herring
not red as you hoped, but
bone-white, chipped me.

My mother dislikes
ornate, shiny, fishy things.
This known, I lash to
internal tears, hide a flowing.

I tell you, daddy - never
lie, I can see words glistening
in your pan. We sit as ceiling
sprinkles us in golden dust.

Diminutive departure

When at eight o'clock,
Or was it five, I made
A movement, only singly
Disjointed, somewhat
Smug – toward a wooden door

Battened down, in wool, blue, buttoned
I felt flattened by the wind between
Two doors, one inside, the other out –

Blustery, my face blistered ice-cold
Eyes simpered in overcool
I wished for a satchel, a silk scarf,
A harlequin's hand to hold.

I stepped as if sautéed in oil, vernacular
Curses down the stairs, quilted underfoot
In down, white like snow. My hair
Melting under the baroque of the moment.

The filets of icicles buried thigh-high
In mounds, once earthen, brownbaked,
Mums in ochre hangover, barely
Brambles, the larger hardy reds more vivid.

Briefly I enjambed boot in crevice,
Hole without small visitor, once, twice,
Thrice-covered, he holed up, wintry,
Sleeping in fetal, warmed and winning.

And myself, mortal as malice.

Grey

We once used
pilled wool to wean
ourselves from ingrown
mothers, replaced ourselves –

suckling instead
meatless chunks of warm, grey
lambscomb, imitating musty oatmeal,

shearing the disruption
between teat and airborne
independence, unwanted milk –

children divorced,
connections severed,
dismayed apoplexy bleats
sullen neutrals.

informer

my tongue a meat
thermometer, popping
out when cooked
through.

temperature, a foreign,
unwieldy matter - i
measure damage by
degree.

a plaster wall fell toward
me, divided toes four
and five, pigs none and wee
wee all the way home.

is this pork then, my unlikely
blue puffin, so unruly a
brute, a shoe is a bruise
to the eye.

Our Florida driveway

You never blew
snow out of our
Florida driveway. Never
demonstrated a birthday

unless reminded. This
did not just become, was
evidently always yours,
purposeful. Dusting -

women's work, as
babies, scrubbing toilets,
malingering in strip malls
buying Hallmark drippage.

That silver car was cleaner
than your shirts, rolled to
sleeve, ironed into early
deaths. You were strong

in them, their stricture
pleased you. You never
kissed our gay black mannequin,
his headless fiberglass form covered

over in bright scarves, Chinese
stork umbrellas. Add-on balloon
head. His name became Nick, although
he was dickless. But, you were out. You

were partying. You never blew
snow out of our Florida driveway.

INTERSPACE

Diaphanous (the wedding)

My disposition vague
 stretching early to waking behind
 moth wings
 lace curtains, I rummaged
 a church sale
 remnant, once a simpering tablecloth,
 flaccid as crumbs,
 a social expectation.

Soft eager mouths, wine
 over flowering bellies, missives of tradition
 request my reply in earnest by deadline.

The morning flows, orb'd
 light filtering over
 wooden slats of rippled floor
 damaged in dapple, since
 overflowing, the seepage of
 comfortable slumber in slats, the
 fingers of condensed air.

My makeshift throws itself back
 through slanting mirror
 antique vanity with clawed foot to
 demonstrate the curve
 behind sleepwilted eyes, now blooming
 fairy dust. I trace

buttons, my fingertips through
 outline, the fabric
 overdense smooth, no tarnish would bake
 itself into silk, taffeta –
 nor does a fingerprint
 dent a perfect O, simply defines
 itself against a backdrop of second
 skin, perfecting the eager threads,
 marriage
 of garment to the blind eyeholes.

Capricornicus

In barlight you seem frozen
icepick sharp, could shatter a
warmblooded will with words.
But smelling you is superheated

such an attractive contradiction.
Like dawn in winter with smooth
rice pudding. Soft rain in mown
hay and dried tobacco. Always

and never, our words would meet
and divide nations, veto planets
out of their orbits, funnel our hearts
into the dead of silent space. I left

you. I burned a collarless shirt as
incense, slept on photographs
stained by sun and your hands. Wore
gloves and got a sunburn. It

will not follow you, that scent. Musk
of dog, but sweeter yet, and the
newly-fired gunpowder of cologne on
the cuffs. It remains as I wish it gone.

If I turn now, in this place we came
not lately, I see myself reflected. There
are shards of ice left where your
fingers touched the fire and won.

Drizzle

He can identify
over 30 shades
of grey. Rides hump-
backs of cumulus
in slippery grogginess

preceding deep sleep. I
ask him, quietly, to certify
my mood, specify
a shade to suit it - dub it
coat of mail, or tempered

matte veneer. His
eyelids have layered
themselves over
sight, visions of
mottled lapidarians,
porous sedimentary

statues, death-pallor
of pasture wall, all
become nightshades.
He peers through grass
on a dreambelly stained
with drizzle.

Benefit of the doubt

A notecard scribbled
with these words, why
can't you ever give me
the ...?

During a shower again
repetitious scribbles
on glass invited by
warmed mist, blares

backwards written in
a style not familiar,
same mediocre
phrase. I step out

to bare ashen teeth,
check bathroom mirror,
it only shines brightly,
smeared message

still blaring through
hot water behind me. I cannot
spell deceit with foreign
handwriting, not his

markings. I study
body smears, run bleach
and scalding water over
the perpetual stain.

Earlier

Whiteout came hurricaning through
my alley. Pigeon-loft became
vacant, feathers left floating with
flakes. Rows upon rows of chilly eyes. –

floor-to-ceiling windows, waiting
expectantly to open a view, cover a night,
return a rock dove glance. Viewing here
is burnt brick umber and incandescent light.

And now white. I wait the white to bring
a tread my cat recognizes. Down a long hall
past graffiti rudy loves liz for a good time call
512-897-8876 two boots press cold into carpet.

The cat a statue in windowell, sits
pompously licking his paw, watching one-
eyed, the door. No movement, save the tongue
flashing, I am suddenly snowblind.

February 15

Our blowdryer
becomes a single
owner, hand-held
device.

You lose yourself
in aisles of pity
while I move,
struggle, extract

heavy discontent.
Dusty futon leaves its
dirty hoofprints
on yesterday's happy

valentine. Now
its smudge imbeds
itself in my thumbprint,
black thorn.

We picked each leaf
on that fichus, carried
them all together,
grouped and trim.

Last year it swelled
with its own meaty
weight, now I pick
brown flakes off,

turn the whirl of
hairdryer to break still
air, watch flakes
crumble and float.

Half-life of smoke

I still had a key, knew
the obvious combination, same
as my old address. Had committed
a minor crime earlier, seeing
you pass a note to a stringy blond

via sticky tray. I gagged and
felt your ring's absence, a month
in absentia. Put my seventh glass
down and howled with laughter, a
cry of mercy unrecognized.

My ex-waitress muscles felt the
weight of the reply, the coy play
at fragility, worth. My thumb
curled into its opposing palm. Stoli
and cranberry sweating itself out.

I played at vehicular suicide at
closingtime, drove into jumping curbs,
disheveled mulch. Strutted to our ex-
door listening to t.v. buzz behind it. Blew
a smokecloud in through opened door.

That cloud never left.

Light smear

My mascara runs to-
night, blurring the blue-red-blue
flashing flashing, me tucked
into molded plastic seat of autojail.

Honeycomb-barred from officers,
cushioned bravely in tidy
raspberry-blue. I wonder if they
iron and starch color into full bloom.

Hear Him between the frontseat radio
fuzzing, saying, "no, it's my car," then
"nonono ... I don't ... her ...
arrest- " My fingerprints pose no

threat to plastic, smear themselves
over the dimpled surface, not through, as
his words though me, skip lightly out,
"it's mine."

His tongue is a diseased
weapon longing to be cut out.

Bijou Sympatico

Pedal-back seats
swooshing madly, red runners
of feet smudge the dark
through, sticky mashed
crackles of husk -snap-

underfoot, buttered, and above
naked wrists wind
roughly, mine smooth,
milkyfilm white, glowing –
pale moon, wanes

when yours waxen, tangles swiftly
onscreen
--windblown hair, tarbaby
halfight, fingers filter
intricate petals in dusk.

Caress each tip
memorize infinitesimal weaves
in silken flesh, matters
knot the language in flesh.

Faces backlit, I hold symmetry
to my hushed mouth, sip it
dry to brittle, feel your words slip
past me in nightshade, fading

to find sympathy in darkness.

CAESURA

Angler

Was it he who took
my cerebellum away, swooped
away as my swaying body laxed
into mushy puddle?

I was caught with a shiny forked
prong, lip-locked on the prize. Last I
recall is brick-blood, blackness pulled
over on me and silver aluminum wave.

Could it be symbolic of fornication
the feminists shriek, the construct-
ion of the fornix, how the sounds loop
around the thalamus like lubricating jelly?

Fishing is offensive. It's the bait of men
to women, the self-serving male organ of kill
the worm and set the hook, boat's prow driving
itself through liquid water. I'm telling you.

I'm telling you there's a sure incidence
of a clitoral image there, and penile
intentions, care to read it into the fishing line -
study the smoothness of the bobber, up and down.

Suckerfish, bottomfeeder, your fins and
water breathing leave you gasping as air
pulls the gills, forces flesh from bone. It will
be good eatin, and go down easy. Keep thinking that.

The tickle of dying fluid to corpus callosum,
means seminal goes vaginal, and taut
ventricle, pons, become limp as
dead fish, eyes gone bad in the sun

whiteness comes then
a bland dryness to the scales.

calamine

that summer, we
shared the netting
with bloodletters,
their curlicue tongues

sticking us in the dark.
Smeared lotion over
ourselves like holy
water, the divine itch

delivering us from
slumber. In those
loose windless moments
before sleep hit, i

heard their tinny screams,
funneling their small
noise past pinna into
incus, small-shelled

cochlea. i prayed
a noiseless dirge, lips
tracing the eucharist, this
is my blood, spilled

for you.

rounder

habitual, like
my callused feet
beneath me, you
contest my door's
stability, falling

obliquely, your
long form amiss,
lip torn, dried blood,
collapsed clumsy.

Back again, my
3 am welcome mat,
drowsing and rummy
roused by Anais Anais,

Steelman love potion
number nine, droning
background. Chamberman, piss-
baron, you win ass

prizes in a dead heat, close
nudie bars with a hand
up someone's skirt, falling
hard outside responsibility.

Inevitably, I, chamber-
mistress, listening after
record skip skips, for
a scattered breathing,

limp, soggy thing.

telesthesia

a thumb no bigger than it
was at age 5, further your whole
right hand, your first act of violence
against the thalidomide.

the first time we met, you
slid into my palm like a tired
fish, the skin scaly and dazed,
small and dry.

that and your cockeyed
smile, the drawl from the right
eye, you saying i'm the lizard
boy, i can see out both i's at the

same time. we slept in
separate beds for two weeks
but found strange hook glyphs
in linen sheets, heard jingling

censers, discovered patchouli
between our toes. you called,
said nothing, hung up, kept
a rose scarf in the window for me,

ran away to vegas. i could hear
the exhaust in the vw sputtering
over the border, i wore the scarf
to free breakfast every Sunday.

now i hear your asthmatic
baritone flap open, whistle shut.
you should quit smoking dope,
keeps me awake nights, your flopping
sleep, seventeen hours away.

slush

a photograph sits neatly on
rounded corner of kitchen cupboard
above the filled sink, smiling.

you pick it up look behind
while scrubbing the blank-faced dishes

no name, date written, just Kodak Kodak
Kodak, like the bear in winter
alaska whiteout without the i.

where, you wonder, has the i gone?

pictures without names are unclaimed
footprints in slush, could
belong to a new-booted neighbor

or ex-lover smoking djarum
clove cigarettes, your favorites before
quitting, two years ago, smoke stung your eyes.

now the soap-sudsy edges dance in
wavers through your saline lids, as
visions of the bread/tobacco aisles,

hands kneading hands, finding
the sweet cancer stalks, plucking them
gently, as once he fed his hands
your breasts, nipples, you
remember the name,
and the i.

Lullaby for one in love

“Getting company inside one’s skin.” – Maggie Scarf

The world is black
I am round with its
circumference, thick
as intercourse,

quite as tricky. My
pregnancy is fickle,
ticks in time with
cranky ankle, cracks in

pavement, breaks
mommy’s back. When
I slept sideways last
evening, a kick

boxer drummed his
pulse through
umbilicus, vein,
slickened cord of us.

I understood its
morse coding, a
tiny pounding, of
let me drown in you,

drown interminably
in you, my mother.
The tapping will not
end, blackness eats it.

Blackness hums it
to sleep.

The Stillborn

Love dies because its birth was an error.

- Susan Sontag

Your mouth echoes hello
it means goodbye, visiting in
that bright motel room where
lights had been oiled on, off.

No coffee percolating, ice
popping madly, but stillness
as before a storm, pewter grey.
Your pupils have no color

tonight, do not dilate. Trap
light, drain into the sieve that
empties nowhere. In the tempest
of the room, permanent dullness.

You stare through the pounding
next-door neighbors, contractions
against your wall, the fucking
on borrowed mattress.

You are expectant as a mother, birthing
something already alone and
without sweet air, trying to resuscitate
a drowned woman.

I am a pillar of sand, shaped by
birth fluids, drying quickly in
this slick light, crumbling gently
on a bedsheet of silica.

excide

if you do not
dither, it is easier -
removing a section
that will be missed,

yet is invisible to you
if female. That inner
pincushion that dr.
smear warned you

about, over his pinprick
scrutiny. You spread
before him, opened
like a stubborn tin can.

He prodded before, but
now is certain of infection.
It must be cleansed, wiped
pure, contained, away

away, away from his kind.
The needle is heavy inside,
hollow juice tip squeezing
pressure into pain.

You are motionless, as
thick needle is removed,
replaced with a whirring
wire, zips off the top,

placed in a jar submerged
in juice not your own.

Hard

Bloat that lingers
just below the belt-
line, sweet juice
malingering, maybe
germinating. It is

not malleable, double-
drop loaves into the
oven, but tender, hard
with a crust to the inside,
toast- warm.

Meat of the matter is second-
course, how difficult
sitting becomes, in a spotless
apartment, bits of rare
flesh seeps out, juicy.

Stuck on cutting board, earlier
Dr. extracted the cauliflower
colored death, smelled it
blooming and cooked through,
slapped it in the pan

with the others.

puncture wounds

village people ymca radio
blaring, you are a stone
face with little nubs for ears
useless creosote eyes that
bumble and shake hell

she of leather jacket recently
stolen picks at the scab
of an argument with her eye
tooth, jabs it neatly, sharp,

it erupts into sound. gales
vibrate through her hair. now
it's the cult, you are molten,
dripping something transparent

when it touches her, it sears
her eyelashes off, moves
lower, she's hairless. When you
lean to kiss her, a vacuum.

appetite

how grossly
enamored, your
smile sits on puckered
head. Shoveling

teeth nestle in
her hair across a
red checkerboard
table. She sucks

water in quick sticks
through funneled
straw, cannot drink
quickly enough.

Her skin wrinkles,
she is pink in raisin
skin, slowly melting
into liquid. You tell

a magazine story, how
loss is a gain. Plucking
her ears with a sticky
tongue, driveling tripe

she cannot eat. You
grow, how you grow
thick with knowing,
watch her whittle down

girth with glittering
knife of hunger, settle
urgent rumblings with
saliva, paper cuttings,
swallowed as substitute.

Squall

"She sings like she's got a secret,
and if you listen long enough,
she'll tell it to you -- and only you."

-Linda Barnes

So abrupt, a shift
in timbre, a pitch
beginning deep,
tremolo, to pincushion
listeners' skin.

Snatching itself
midbreath into
canorous seduction,
then, a denigrating
sullen sempre.

Audience follows
notes, beats time
in suspicious taps,
measure by measure
legato through fermata.

Denouement is feral,
fortifies itself on
breathed air, pelts
a startled crowd,
fortis.

Real beauty

finds its breath
stilled by diagonal
sharpness.

Colors so vivid they
burst through stained
glass, like flour poured

on blood-violets, blue velvet.

Souls can hold
immeasurable depths
of wholeness resplendently

encased in mirth,
ribs, the jabbed
egocentricities of self.

Wines, the flavor of
passion, merlots feel the smooth
lips of vine, slit fruit runs.

Grape frost between
bleached toes, smearing the
hunger through, coldprints on

spider-web, dewy, the
lattice of fine print, calliope
of dreams becomes realization.

Bane

Can you smell
laughter between
her eyes, her legs
perfect, a perfect v ?

Reach and pull,
flex, bend, taste
crunches, you do
not believe it is

inaccessible. O
taste, taste dark
hair, small goatee
of widow's peak.

What hides there
is malignant, but
warm, will speak
lullabies, stroke

lips rouge. Contain
a simple eloquence -
drink the warmth,
embrace her bane.

Canis lupus

You lured it,
chewed and mumbled
carved it a new niche,
in your seedy backyard -

behind the unmown
grass, next to your
high school gym, it
trips soundlessly.

Dead vermin laced
with promises, ever
afters, scent of
mutton and barley.

It takes only months
to tame the yellow
eyes to stalk your
prize, stroke the

nesty fur, so thick.
So thick it can be
tasted with fingers,
caught up and gobbled

eaten and kempt.